

A Look Back...

FIRST AROUND-THE-WORLD FLIGHT

6 APRIL—28 SEPTEMBER 1924



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One of the most sensational aviation events of the 1920s took place in 1924 with the U.S. Army Air Service's round-the-world flight. It was the first globe-circling flight in aviation history, with four Douglas World Cruiser airplanes departing Seattle, Washington, on 6 April 1924 and heading westward for Asia via Alaska.

The Air Service selected the specially designed Douglas World Cruiser biplane which carried a single engine capable of reaching a top speed of 120 mph. McCook Field, Ohio, pilot and engineer Lt Erik Nelson helped design the prototype, test, and ultimately went on to pilot one on the global mission. In all, four World Cruisers took part in the mission, piloted by experienced pilots and copilots/mechanics:

Seattle Maj Frederick Martin, pilot; and Sgt Alva Harvey, mechanic

New Orleans Lt Erik Nelson, pilot; and Lt John Harding, mechanic

Chicago Lt Lowell Smith, pilot; and Lt Leslie Arnold, mechanic

Boston Lt Leigh Wade, pilot; and SSgt Henry Ogden, mechanic

The tour route was divided into seven sections or divisions with each covering a specific area of the globe:

Division 1— Seattle, Washington, to Attu, Aleutian Islands (6 April to 14 May)

Division 2— Attu, Aleutian Islands, to Kagoshima, Japan (15 May to 3 June)

Division 3— Kagoshima, Japan, to Calcutta, India (4 to 30 June)

Division 4— Calcutta, India, to Constantinople, Turkey (1 to 11 July)

Division 5— Constantinople, Turkey, to London, England (12 to 16 July)

Division 6— London, England, to Boston, Massachusetts (17 July to 7 Sept)

Division 7— Across the United States (8 to 28 Sept)

Fuel, supplies, spare parts, crew accommodations, and maintenance support for the flight were pre-positioned at many of these locations. McCook Field became the main logistics base, with subordinate depots located in each division. Fairfield Ohio Air Intermediate Depot was responsible for obtaining, packaging, and shipping parts and supplies to the various airfields within the divisions. The four-plane flight took off from Lake Washington, near Seattle, at 8:47 a.m. 6 April 1924. Weight restraints prohibited the carrying of radios, parachutes, life preservers, and rafts. Unfortunately, only two of the planes—*New Orleans* and *Chicago*—returned to Seattle six months later at the completion of their globe-circling journey. The *Seattle* had been forced down twice before and was due in from Chignik, Alaska but never made it into Dutch Harbor on 30 April due to heavy fog and Major Martin flying off course into a mountain. Finally, on 10 May, word came to the three other crews, who were at Attu Islands, that the *Seattle* crew had been found after a several days in the Alaska wilderness. After hiking through the wildness and spending a day at a trapper's lodge for a few days, the duo made it to a native village called Hot Springs across the bay from the cannery at Port Moller, where they sent a message of their whereabouts.

On 3 August, the flyers took off from Kirkwall on the Orkney Islands for Hornafjord, Island. Roughly an hour and half later the *Boston* ditched in the North Atlantic due to oil pressure

suddenly falling to zero and the engine beginning to show signs of the lack of oil to the bearings. Realizing that the engine would soon freeze, Lieutenant Wade landed in the ocean. After a series of naval vessels began towing the plane, attempts to raise it out of the water and repair and the sequential towing again, damaged the *Boston* beyond repair. On the morning of 4 August, the plane capsized due to being water logged and it came free of its towline. The gasoline tanks were then left open in order to assure the aircrafts sinking to afford no menace to shipping. The aircraft was abandoned as it was decided that it was impossible to save the plane in any manner, and the crew proceeded to Reykjavik aboard the *USS Richmond*.

Upon their return to the United States in September after the grueling, six-month odyssey, President Calvin Coolidge and his cabinet met the weary crews of the *New Orleans* and *Chicago*. Continuing from the nation's Capital, the two aircraft stopped at McCook Field for three days (14-16 September). En route to the field, they were met near Columbus, Ohio, by McCook test pilot Lieutenant Harold Harris flying a six-engine Barling bomber triplane. Over Wilbur Wright Field, the crews were greeted by the words "Welcome World Fliers" painted in huge letters on the ground. Upon landing at nearby McCook, an estimated crowd of 75,000 people cheered the planes and crews. McCook technicians serviced and repaired the aircraft while flight surgeons examined the crews and declared them fit to continue their journey.

The final landing of *New Orleans* and *Chicago* took place at Seattle before a crowd of 50,000 enthusiastic fans at 1:28 p.m. on 28 September—175 days after their takeoff. The record-setting mission had covered 26,300 miles in a total flight time of 363 hours—the equivalent of 15 days, 3 hours, and 7 minutes in the air at an average speed of 80 mph.

After the post-flight festivities, ferry crews flew the two remaining World Cruisers back to McCook Field. The world flight crewmen were decorated by Congress with the Distinguished Service Medal and also received several foreign awards. In 1957, *New Orleans* went on permanent display at the National Museum of the United States Air Force and then in 2005 moved to the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. The *Chicago* is on display at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

Additional Reading:

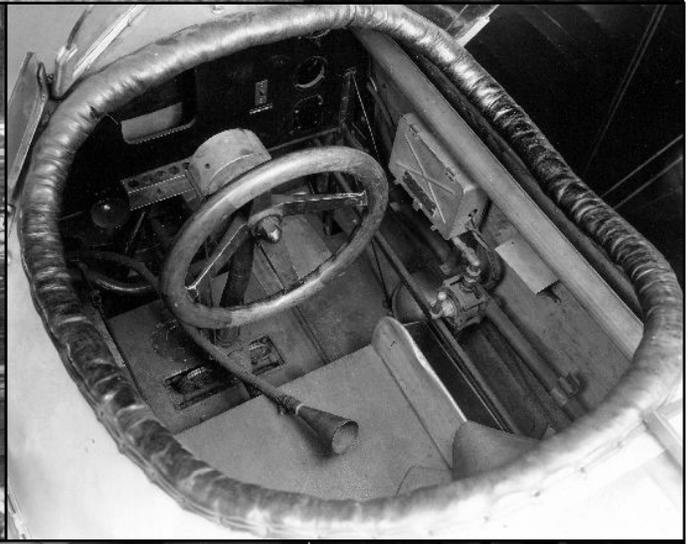
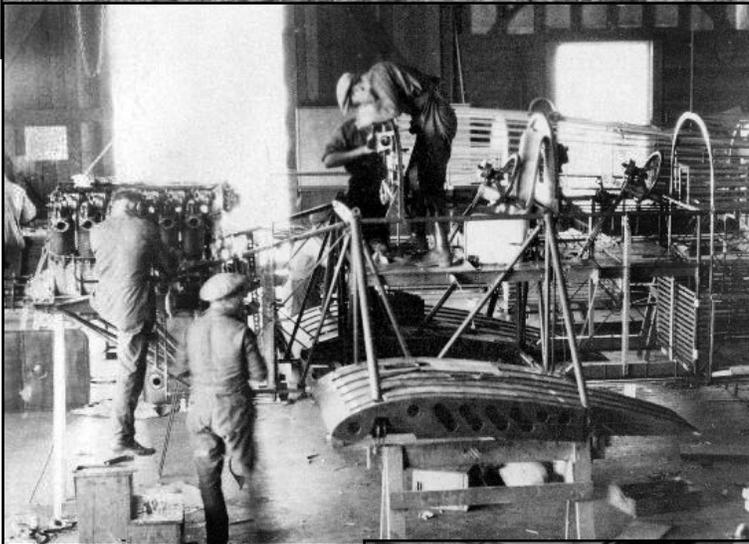
Lowell Thomas, *The First World Flight: Being the Personal Narratives of Lowell Smith, Erik Nelson, Leigh Wade, Leslie Arnold, Henry Ogden, John Harding*, Boston and New York : Houghton Mifflin, 1925.

C.V. Glines, *Around the World in 175 Days: the First Round the World Flight*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Inst. Press, 2001.

C.V. Glines, "Around the World - Seventy-five years ago this month, Army Air Service biplanes touched down in Seattle after circumnavigating the Earth," *Air Force Magazine*, Volume 82, No. 9 (September 1999), p. 78-83.

Rob Crotty, "Magellans of the Sky," *Prologue Magazine*, Volume 42, No. 2 (Summer 2010), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/summer/magellans.html>.

FIRST AROUND-THE-WORLD FLIGHT



The Douglas World Cruisers were built at the Douglas Company factory in San Monica, California. Pictured are various images from the factory and employees working on various stages of the World Cruisers.



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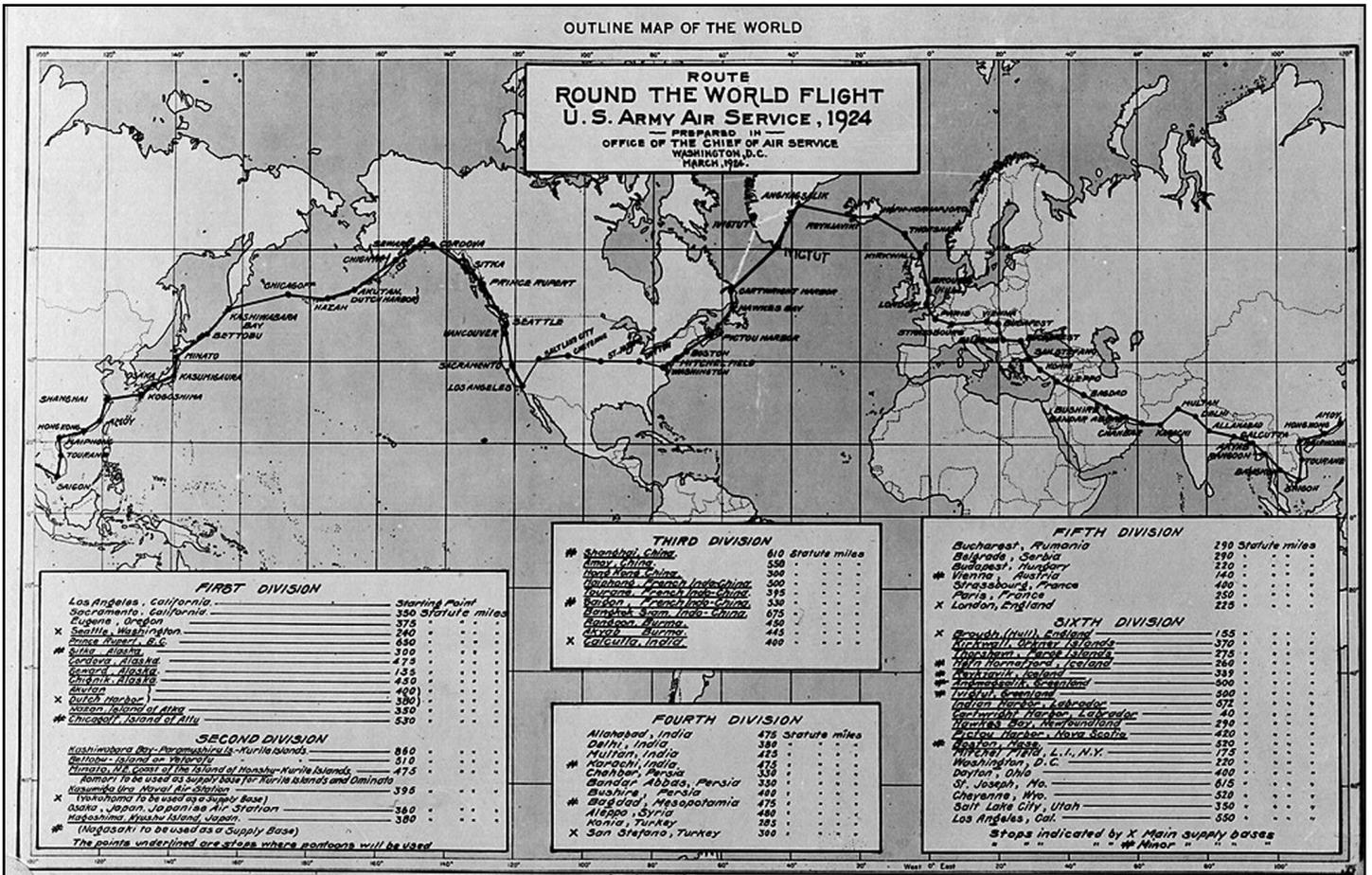
Top: The crew of the Douglas World Cruisers, known as the "World Fliers," pose in front of the *Chicago* at McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio. **Bottom Left:** Lieutenants Ogden and Wade, crew of the *Boston* and later the *Boston II* at McCook Field. **Bottom Right:** Lieutenants Arnold and Smith in front of the *Chicago* at McCook Field.



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Top: Crowds gather to see the Douglas World Cruisers at Clover Field, Santa Monica, California, on 17 March 1924. Clover Field was the home field for the Douglas Company. **Bottom:** The route that the World Fliers traveled that reflected international borders shaped politically by European colonialism and animosities resulting out of World War I.



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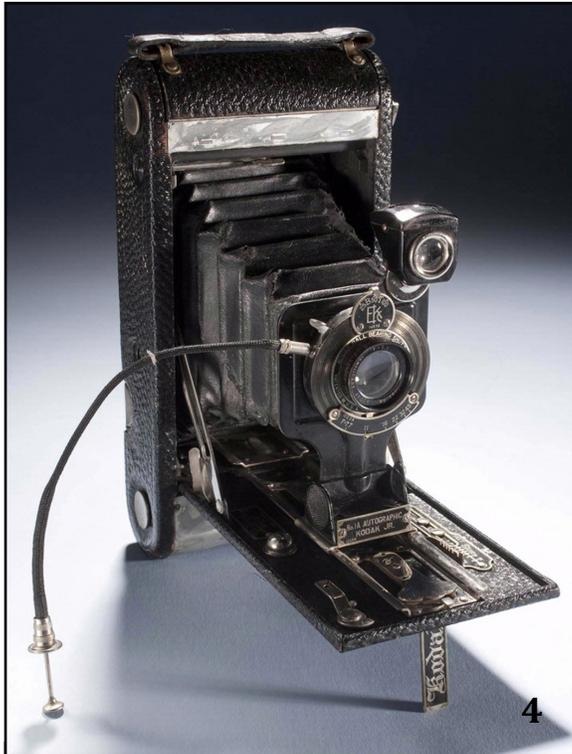


Top: World Fliers pictured (left to right) Lt Jack Harding, Lt Erik Nelson, Lt Leigh Wade, Maj Frederick Martin, First Lt Leslie Arnold, Lt Lowell Smith, and Lt Le Clair Schulze. They are wearing black armbands in honor of former US president Woodrow Wilson, who had recently passed away. **Bottom:** The four Douglas World Cruisers parked on a grassy field.



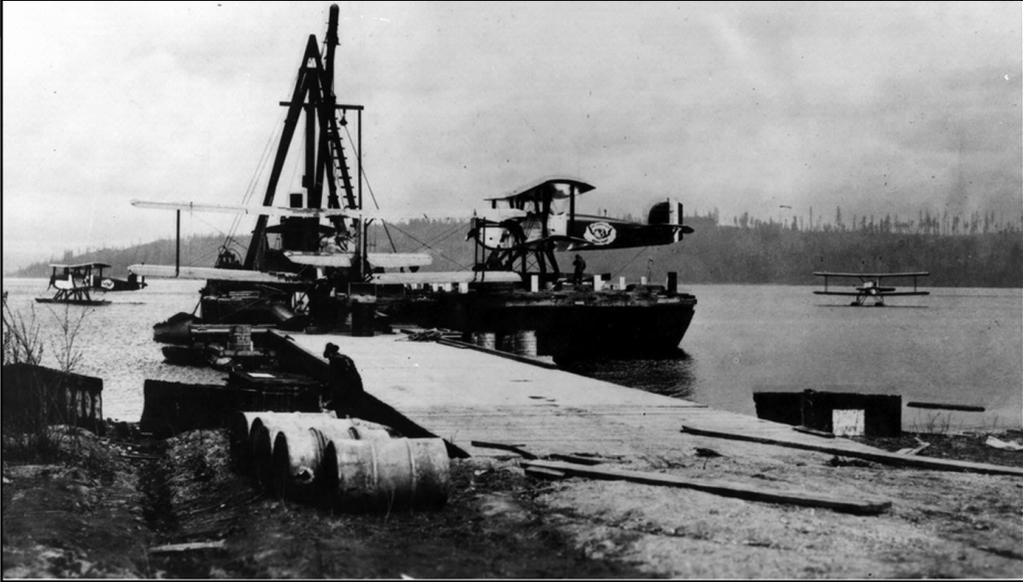
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Clockwise beginning at top: 1. Aircraft and engine repair tools carried on a World Cruiser. The fliers had to maintain and repair their airplanes themselves with their own tools at crucial moments along the flight. 2. Each member of the crew carried a stuffed spider monkey as a mascot. "Maggie" was carried on board the Boston as good luck charm and was signed on the side "Boston" by pilot Lt. Leigh Wade.



3. The medical kit carried by Lieutenant Lowell Smith during the flight. 4. Lt Lowell Smith took this No. 1A Autographic Kodak Junior folding camera along on the flight and utilized "autographic" film and a stylus. The user could write data on the negative via carbon paper fit in-between the film and the film backing.

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Top: Floats were installed on the Douglas World Cruisers at Sand Point on Lake Washington, Seattle, Washington. **Middle:** The Douglas World Cruiser flagship *Seattle* departs Lake Washington, Seattle, Washington, on 6 April 1924 to begin the journey. **Bottom:** The Army Air Service installed floats on the Douglas World Cruisers at Sand Point.

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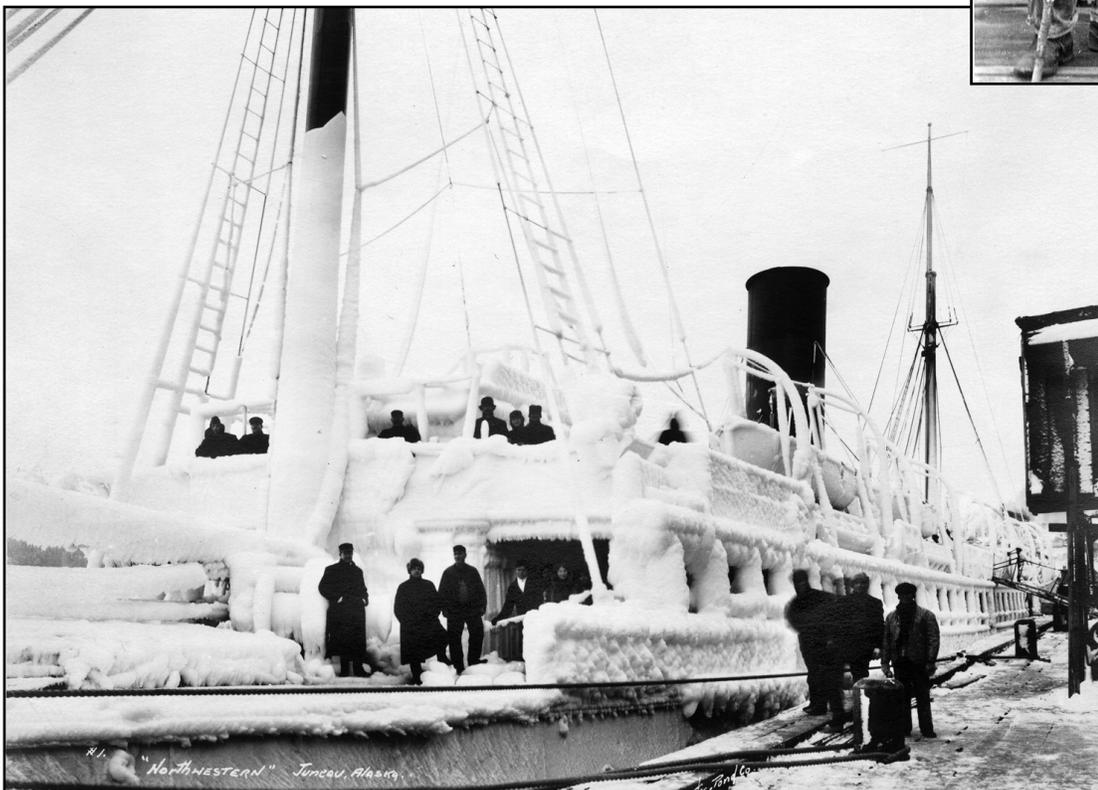
Top: Douglas World Cruisers arriving into Resurrection Bay, Seward, Alaska. **Bottom:** One of the World Cruisers taking off from water.



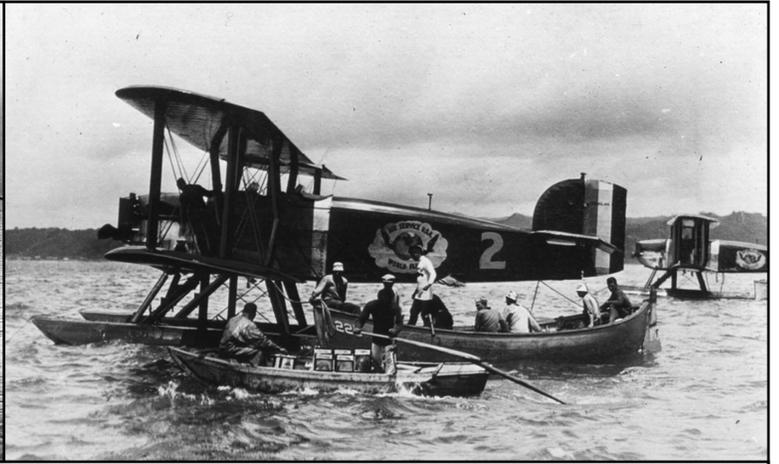
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Top: *Seattle* after it flew into a mountain after developing mechanical issues and flying into fog on 30 April near Port Moller, Alaska. **Middle:** Maj Martin and Sgt Harvey shortly after returning to civilization upon being lost in Alaska for ten days when the *Seattle* developed mechanical issues and, when flying in fog, crashed into the side of a mountain. **Bottom:** The Steamship *SS Northwestern*, carrying supplies to Seward in support of the World Fliers, docked in Juneau, Alaska.



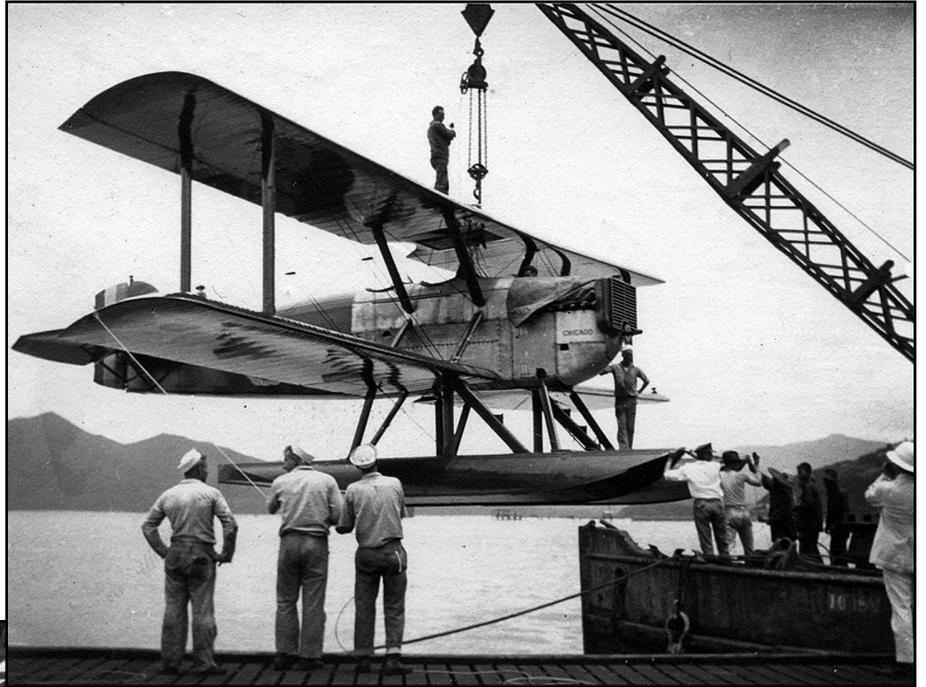
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Top Left: World Fliers landing at Kagoshima, Japan, after the first aerial crossing of the Pacific Ocean. Japanese children on the shore sang "My Country Tis of Thee" as the pilots landed. **Top Right:** Servicing the *Chicago* with Mobiloil in Japanese waters. **Middle:** Two of the World Cruisers anchored in the chaotic harbor of Shanghai, China among junks and other small vessels. **Bottom:** Citizens in Japan await the World Fliers.



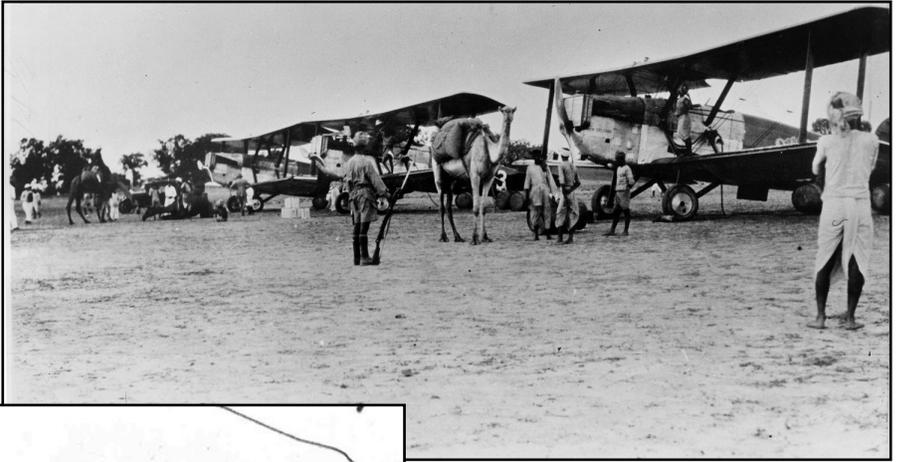
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Top: The *Chicago* being lifted out of the water in Hong Kong. **Middle:** Lowell Smith and Leslie Arnold, assisted by sailors from the *USS Noah* and Vietnamese villagers, install a new Liberty engine on the *Chicago* under a bridge near Hue, French Indochina. **Bottom:** Assisted by soldiers from the destroyer *USS Hart*, the World Fliers replaced floats with wheeled landing gear and serviced the Douglas World Cruisers at Maidan, a park in Calcutta, India.

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Top: Douglas World Cruisers being serviced at Allahabad, India. **Middle:** The *New Orleans* gets serviced in Allahabad, India. **Bottom:** Douglas World Cruiser at one of the refueling/servicing sites along the Fourth Division Route along the path between India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Turkey.



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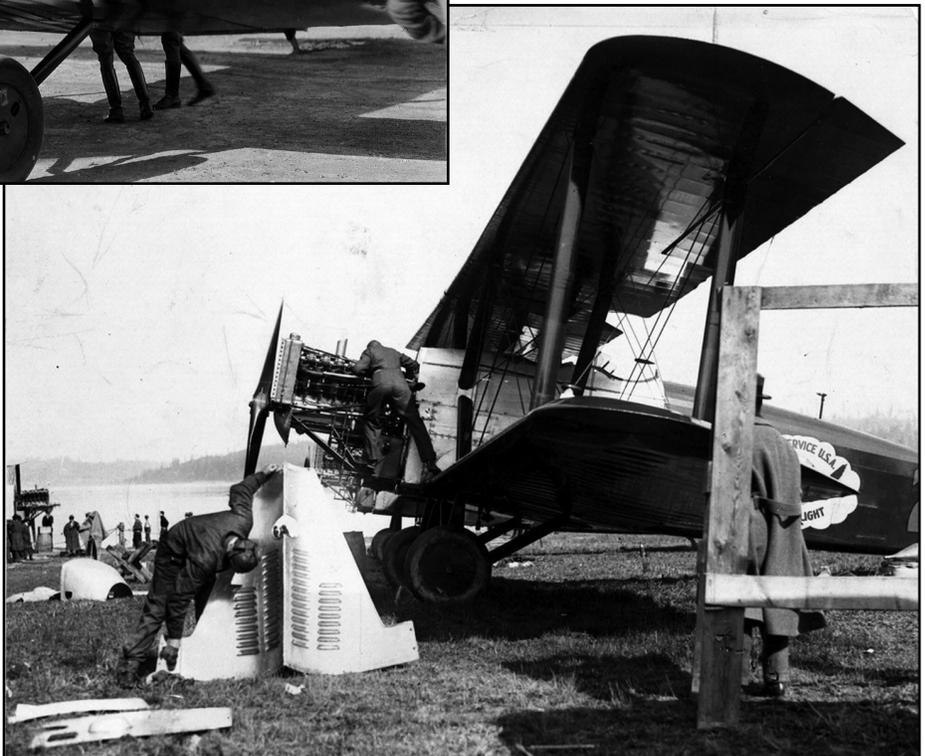
Douglas World Fliers at one of the many refueling/servicing sites along the Fourth Division Route along the path between India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Turkey.



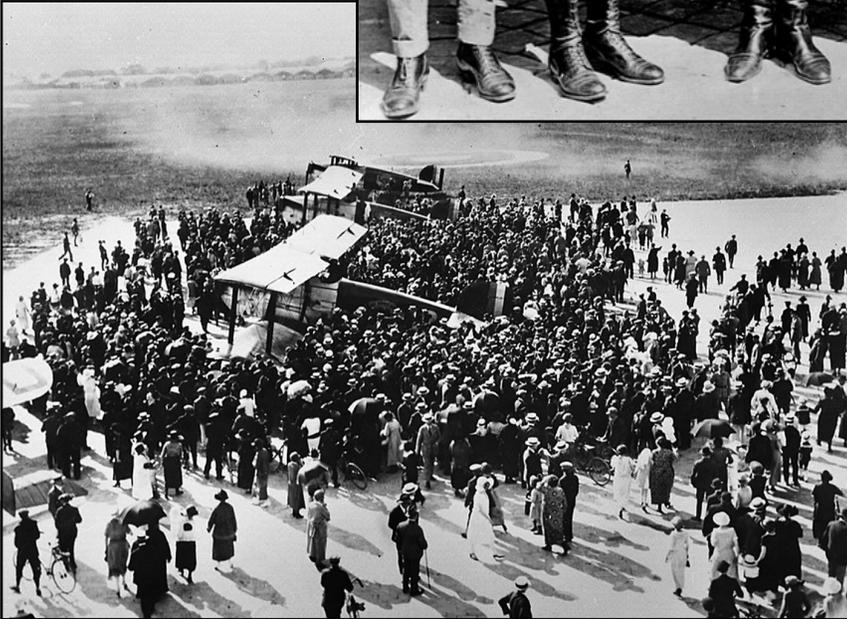
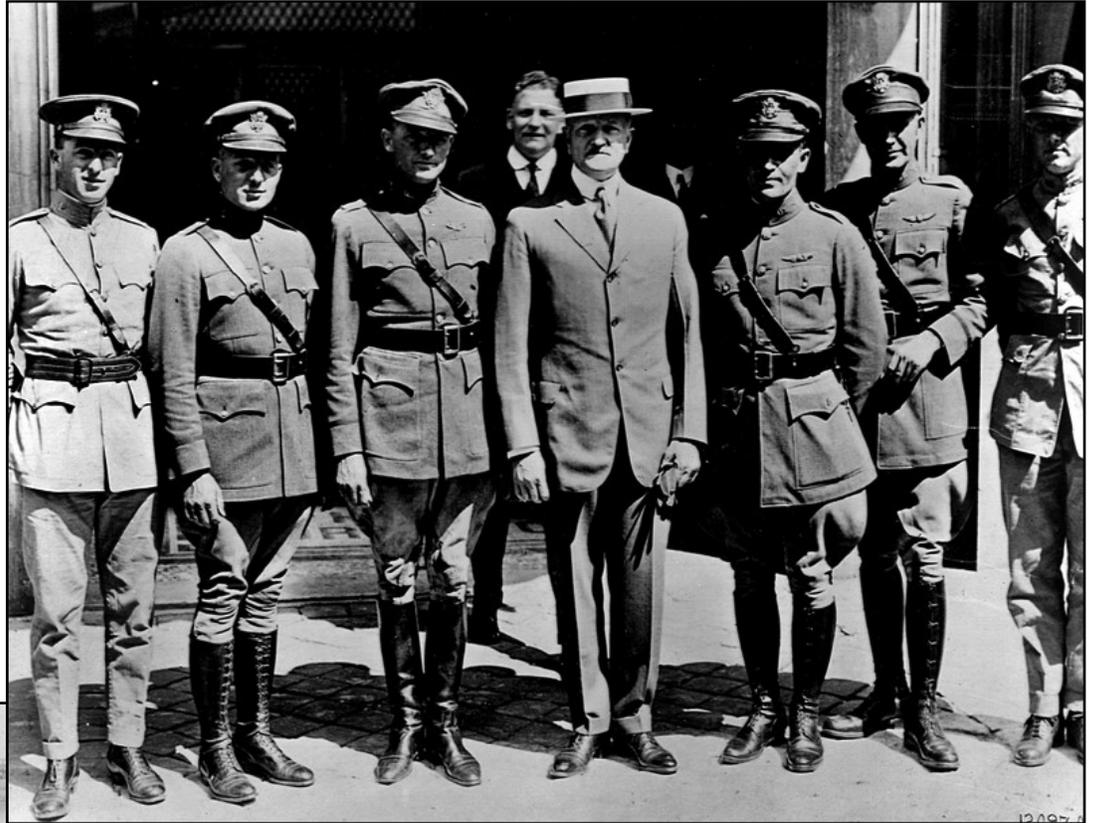
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Top: Lt Lowell Smith oversees the movement of the *Chicago* to the Humber River at Brough, England, before the flight to Scotland. **Middle:** The *Chicago* preparing to depart during one of the Fifth Division legs. **Bottom:** Lts. Lowell Smith and Leslie Arnold service the *Chicago's* Liberty engine as the Fliers had to service their airplanes themselves with tools they carried within the aircraft along the journey.



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Top: The World Fliers in Paris with General John Pershing. **Middle:** People crowd around the Douglas World Cruisers *Chicago*, *Boston*, and *New Orleans* at Le Bourget Aerodrome in Paris on 23 July. **Bottom:** Douglas World Fliers arrived at an airfield during the Fifth Division through Europe.

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Top: Lieutenant Wade chatting with Frenchman in Paris, France. **Middle:** Lt Henry Ogden finishing filling up the *Boston's* oil tank with a gallon of Mobiloil B in Paris, France. **Bottom:** The World Fliers with other American fliers in Paris, France.

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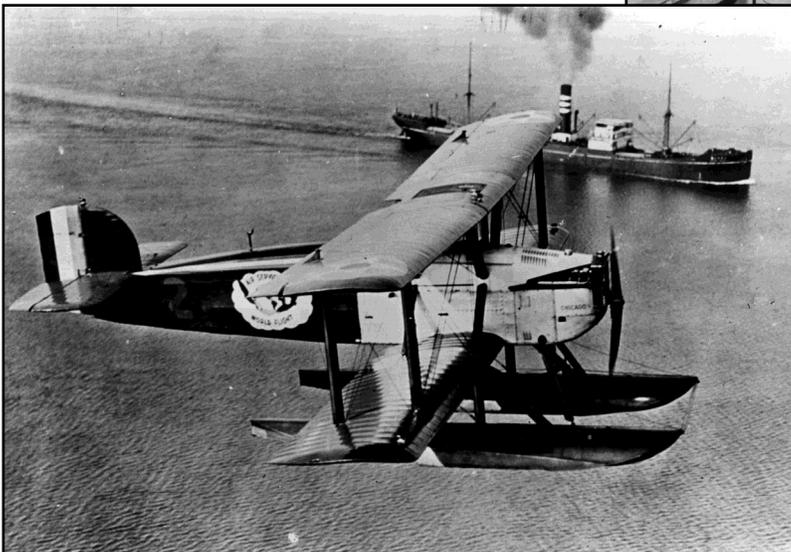
Top: A view of Lts. Lowell Smith and Leslie Arnold in the *Chicago*, in flight. **Bottom:** The *New Orleans* hoisted on to the beach to dry out at Reykjavik, Iceland.



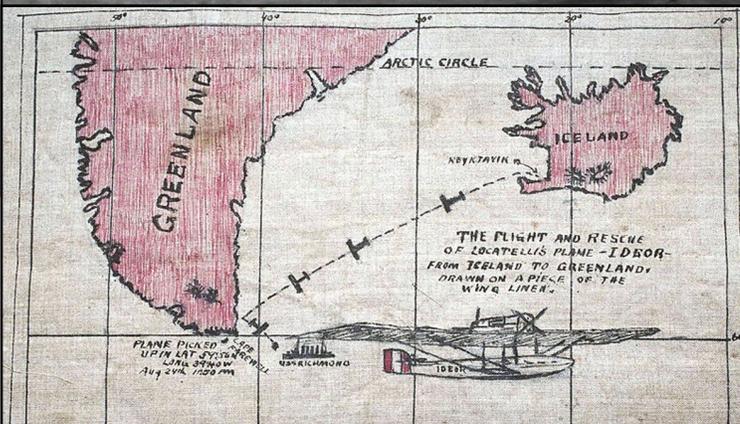
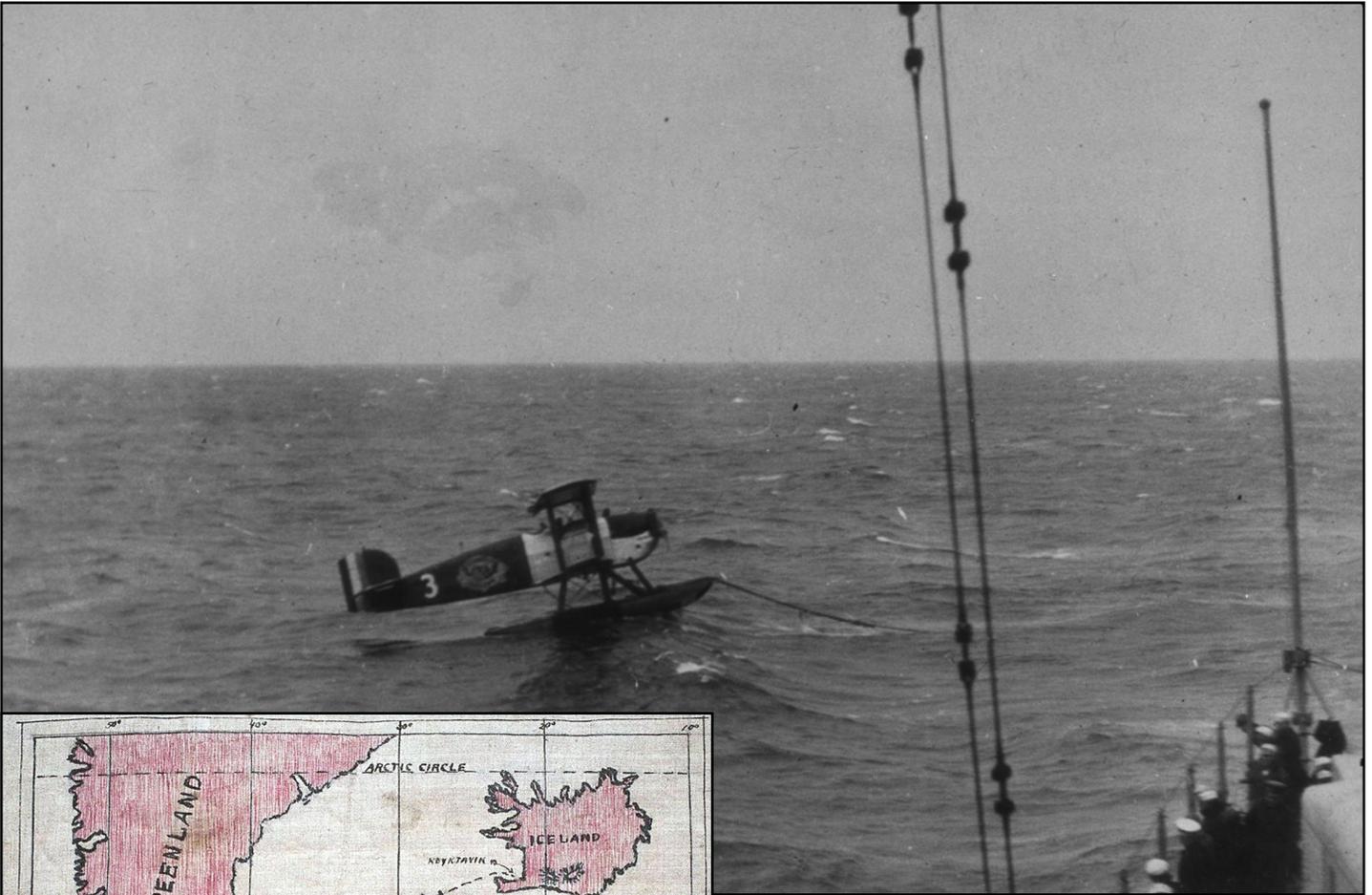
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Top: The *New Orleans* is hoisted up to dry out at Reykjavik, Iceland on 5 August.
Middle: The *Chicago* being lifted up onto a barge to repair a hole in one of its pontoons.
Bottom: The *Chicago* in its seaplane configuration.



FIRST AROUND-THE-WORLD FLIGHT



Top: In the North Atlantic Ocean, between the Orkney Islands and Iceland, on 2 August, the view from the *USS Richmond* showing the disabled *Boston* after a forced landing resulted in the loss of the aircraft. **Middle:** A map of the location of the sinking of the *Boston* off the coast of Greenland on a piece of the aircraft's wing liner. **Bottom:** (Left to Right) F.C. Crosio (Italian flier), Lt John Harding, Dr. Summer of the *USS Richmond*, Lt Erik Nelson, Antonio Locatelli (Italian flier), and Lt Lowell Smith in Reykjavik, Iceland, pose with a painting of the Belle of Iceland. This photo was taken shortly before Locatelli's crew crashed in August 1924.

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Top: The World Fliers arrive in New York City, 8 September. **Middle:** World Fliers welcomed at one of their first stops in the United States in September. **Bottom:** Douglas World Cruiser fliers welcomed by President Calvin Coolidge and Cabinet in Washington, D.C., on 9 September.



FIRST AROUND-THE-WORLD FLIGHT



Top: One of the many events, a parade, the Fliers took part of during their trip across the states. **Bottom:** Once back in the states, the Fliers were guests at many dinners along their flight back West. The first US Army Dinner was held at the Boston Airport on 7 September.



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Top: Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis decorated three Fliers—Maj Frederick Martin, Lieutenant Leigh Wade, and Lieutenant Leslie Arnold—on 27 April 1925 with the Distinguished Service Medal. **Middle:** Unidentified Fliers chatting with the press along the route across the United States. **Bottom:** The Douglas World Cruisers prepare for their flight across the states, pictured is the *Chicago* with the *Boston II* in the background.



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Top: Crew of the *Boston II*, Lt Leigh Wade and SSgt Henry Ogden chat with an unidentified individual along the route West across the United States. **Middle:** The *Chicago*, along with the *New Orleans* and *Boston II*, arrive at Crissy Field in the heart of San Francisco, California. **Bottom:** A Douglas World Cruiser sits parked on a grassy airstrip.



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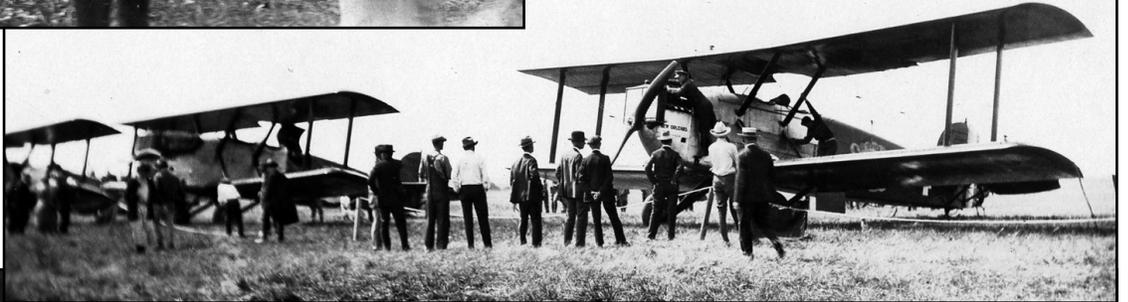
Top: Lt Lowell Smith, pilot of the *Chicago*, greets an unidentified individual after landing. **Middle:** Douglas World Fliers chat after landing at an airfield somewhere along the route in the United States. **Bottom:** The *Boston II*, the prototype Douglas World Cruiser pushed into service after the lost of the *Boston* in the North Atlantic, sits on a grassy field somewhere in the United States.



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Top: Lt Lowell Smith, pilot of the *Chicago*, speaking with an unidentified individual at a grassy airstrip along the route in the United States. **Middle:** The Douglas World Cruisers parked upon a grassy airstrip in the United States. **Bottom:** The six world fliers with adventurer and writer Lowell Thomas. From left to right: Arnold, Harding, Nelson, Wade, Smith, Lowell Thomas, Ogden, and Mrs. Corliss Mossely, secretary to the pilots.





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